

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO
M E M O R A N D U M**

DATE: November 18, 2003

TO: Michael T. Uberuaga, City Manager
via P. Lamont Ewell, Assistant City Manager

FROM: William M. Landsdowne, Chief of Police

SUBJECT: Cedar Fire – Police Department 30-Day After Action Report

Overview

On Saturday, October 25, 2003, at approximately 1737 hours, the Cedar Fire started in a remote area near Ramona. It was determined that the fire was caused by a lost hunter. The brush fire quickly spread due to heavy winds. A Santa Ana weather condition existed during the fire, causing the normally calm easterly wind to change into a strong westerly wind. This caused the fire to rapidly move westbound from its origin. The fire quickly surrounded the Ramona community of the San Diego Country Estates by the late evening hours of October 25, 2003.

On October 26, 2003, at 0030 hours, the San Diego Police Department Horse Mounted Unit received a request for Mutual Aid from the San Diego Humane Society to respond to the East County area of San Diego to assist with animal rescues. The unit members responded to the San Diego County Sheriff's Department (SDSD) command post in Ramona with their trucks and horse trailers to assist. The initial command post had been overrun by fire and the secondary one was also being threatened. The unit was given the mission to search for and rescue horses that had been left behind by owners fleeing the fire. Over the next three days, they were given the areas of Ramona, Lakeside, Blossom Valley, Jamul, Alpine, Guatay, Cuyamaca, Julian, Pine Valley, Harbison Canyon, Dehesa, Crest, and Descanso, to search and assist whenever possible. These areas were deemed inaccessible by fire personnel because fires were still raging and had been or were in the process of being evacuated and were closed to private citizens. This area was given to the unit because no one else could gain access due to the danger. The Mounted Unit rescued more than seventy horses and animals and evacuated many persons in inaccessible areas.

The fire continued westbound toward Highway 67, consuming the countryside north of Blossom Valley, Alpine, Lakeside, San Vicente Reservoir area, and the Barona Indian Reservation. By approximately 0300 hours, the fire had crossed Highway 67 and entered into the Eucalyptus Hills area of Lakeside. SDSD deputies were quickly overwhelmed with evacuation duties and traffic and crowd control. At approximately 0300 hours, SDSD called the Police Department

and requested Mutual Aid assistance.

Santee Command

The Police Department sent one Assistant Chief, one Captain, one Lieutenant, and the Critical Incident Management Unit (CIMU) to the Santee Substation to set up an Incident Command Post (ICP) and to coordinate mutual aid. The ICP was established as the Santee Command. In addition, a squad from Eastern Division was sent to Ramona, and the Beach Enforcement Team responded to the Santee Command.

The officers deployed in Ramona helped deputies conduct evacuations, and when finished, responded to Santee Command. The Beach Enforcement Team assisted in conducting evacuations in Santee and later assumed patrol duties when deputies were needed in other areas of their jurisdiction. The Santee Command deployed Traffic Division's Motor Squad for evacuation and as forward fire observation teams. The Police Department's communication frequencies were used to dispatch calls for service to SDPD officers working in Santee.

As the fire continued through the north side of Lakeside and Poway, it moved rapidly west into the Sycamore Canyon area on the north side of Santee. Motor officers saw that the fire was continuing westbound through Sycamore Canyon. The west end of Sycamore Canyon borders the San Diego communities of Tierrasanta and Scripps Ranch. When it became apparent that the fire was continuing westbound, officers who were no longer needed in Santee were sent to those communities. Northeastern Command and Tierrasanta Command were established at about 0900 hours. Tierrasanta Command was located at Traffic Division while Northeastern Command was located at the Northeastern Sub-station. Because police resources were being deployed to multiple Incident Command Posts and because the fire was spreading, command staff decided to activate the SDPD Department Operations Center (DOC). The DOC was activated at approximately 0900 hours. It remained open with full staffing through 2400 hours on October 27, 2003. A modified DOC remained open until 2200 hours on October 30, 2003. The Police Department also staffed the City Emergency Operations Center (EOC) with an Assistant Chief and a Captain during the same period the full DOC was operational.

Tierrasanta Command

Tierrasanta Command's main concern was the evacuation of the north end of Tierrasanta as the fire crossed south over State Route 52 and approached Clairemont Mesa Boulevard. Officers initially began evacuating north Tierrasanta, but as the fire moved quickly, command staff decided to immediately conduct a mandatory evacuation of the entire Tierrasanta area. To get people out of the area, Santo was turned into a one-way south four-lane road where residents could drive to Aero Drive then westbound to southbound Interstate 15. Qualcomm Stadium was selected as the preliminary staging point for the evacuees. The Red Cross was already overwhelmed and was not ready for the evacuees at Qualcomm. As more than 10,000 evacuees fled to the stadium, a Lieutenant and squad of officers were assigned to set up at Qualcomm and

accommodate the incoming evacuees. The Lieutenant coordinated with Qualcomm management regarding the use of stadium facilities. Red Cross later arrived and handled the needs of the victims.

The fire then crossed over to the west side of Interstate 15 and now threatened the Kearney Mesa area. Evacuation teams were then dispatched to various grids in the Kearney Mesa area south of SR 52 as the fire burned along SR 52 to Interstate 805. Those evacuees were also directed to Qualcomm Stadium. As the fire later threatened the Mission Gorge area, evacuation teams were sent to the area to conduct evacuations. The evacuees were directed to the Balboa Park Activity Center. Approximately 15 dwellings were destroyed by the Cedar Fire in the Tierrasanta area.

At approximately 1422 hours, while units were evacuating Tierrasanta, a fixed wing aircraft crashed on northbound State Route 163, in the center median, behind Fire Station 28. Officers and sergeants in the Tierrasanta Command rushed from the building to assist at the crash site. The officers and sergeants were called back as there were enough officers in the field to handle the situation. In addition, the officers and sergeants never told the personnel officer at the Tierrasanta Command they were responding to the crash site. It took approximately 30 minutes to account for the officers.

The California Highway Patrol and the Fire-Rescue Department assumed command of the plane crash site and relieved all the SDPD units. The CHP conducted the crash investigation and worked with the appropriate Federal agencies.

Northeastern Command

Northeastern Command's concerns were in the Scripps Ranch area. As the fire burned west through the south portion of Poway and Sycamore Canyon, it burned directly at the east border of the Scripps Ranch area. Officers conducted traffic and crowd control, and mandatory evacuations of the residents. The evacuees were directed to Mira Mesa High School. The fires engulfed many Scripps Ranch homes south of Pomerado Road to Interstate 15. A few homes were destroyed just north of Pomerado Road. The fire destroyed more than 335 homes in the Scripps Ranch area. Officers secured the area by establishing traffic control points, restricting access in and around the Pomerado Road area.

Southern Command

To compound the situation, on Saturday evening, October 25, 2003, several other brush fires started in the Southbay area. These out of control fires moved westbound due to the Santa Ana winds and threatened the City of Chula Vista and the Otay Mesa area of the City of San Diego, which included Donovan State Prison and George Bailey Detention Facility. On October 26, 2003, at approximately 0800 hours, Southern Command was activated and began monitoring the progression of the fire, coordinating efforts with the Chula Vista Police Department in the event

evacuations were necessary. The fire eventually stopped burning east of Donovan State Prison and Otay Lake as the fire changed direction to the east. On Monday, October 27, 2003, Southern Command was deactivated. The Southbay fires did not cause any damage in San Diego. Due to their fire situation, Southern Command was unable to contribute personnel to the Cedar Fire effort.

Other Operations

To support field operations, patrol watches were held over and personnel callbacks were initiated.

Officers also escorted Water Department personnel into key and restricted areas.

The Air Support Unit received a request from San Diego Fire-Rescue on October 26, 2003, at 0900 hours, to observe the western edge of the fire as it moved into the Miramar, Scripps Ranch and Tierrasanta areas. Two helicopters (ABLE 1 and 2) were deployed. ABLE 1 transported a fire fighter who was able to communicate to fire crews below, directing their actions to more effectively save homes and property. ABLE 2 provided evacuation support by using their loud speakers as they flew over the affected areas.

Civilian support elements within the Department were also activated. On October 26, 2003, garages at Southern, Eastern, Traffic Motors and Northeastern Divisions were activated to support the needs of field units.

The Department's Public Information Officer kept the media informed of Department activities in the DOC via email.

Operational Support provided logistical and personnel support to the ICP's.

More than 175 field personnel and all available Department assets were directed toward the safe evacuation of the affected areas of Scripps Ranch, Tierrasanta, and San Carlos. The evacuation effort comprised areas with an approximate population of 53,570 citizens residing in 18,162 homes. The evacuations were accomplished without injury to citizens or officers.

Retired Senior Volunteers assisted at the three evacuation centers at Qualcomm Stadium, Balboa Park Activity Center, and Mira Mesa High School.

In addition, the Department received personnel assistance from the Coronado Police Department, Harbor Police Department, United States Border Patrol, United States Coast Guard, Drug Enforcement Administration, and State and Federal Departments of Justice.

To keep the public aware of the fire situation the Community Access Phone System (CAPS) was activated in Room 213 of the SDPD Headquarters building. The CAPS room, staffed with volunteers, was operational from October 26, 2003 at 1205 hours, until November 1, 2003, at 1730 hours. During that operational period they received 12,893 calls.

On October 29, 2003, at approximately 1230 hours, the Scripps Ranch Local Assistance Center (LAC) was opened at the Scripps Ranch Recreation Center located at 11454 Blue Cypress Drive. The LAC was a collection of service agencies set up to assist victims of the fire. The agencies included the City and County of San Diego, the State of California, FEMA and other federal agencies, the Scripps Ranch Association, and various insurance and contractor boards. The agencies set up tables within the center gymnasium. A Police Department Assistant Chief held the Finance/Administration position in the Command Post of the location. San Diego Police Department officers and Retired Senior Volunteers were tasked with tracking the city employees working the various stations within the LAC. In addition, Crisis Interventionists set up a tent in the gymnasium to assist the victims in their time of need. Officers were assigned to secure the premises during the evening hours.

The Cedar Fire destroyed the homes of 23 Police Department employees. The homes were located in both the county and city.

What did we do right?

Officers quickly deployed to the areas affected by the fire and performed mandatory evacuations. Due to the size of the fire, officers many times responded to the areas ahead of fire support. Working in a dangerous environment, officers safely evacuated thousands of residents and secured the neighborhoods affected by the fire.

Coordination between DOC Logistics, Fiscal Management and the supply room was excellent in obtaining needed support equipment, food and supplies.

There was a timely activation of the Department DOC, the establishment of Incident Command Posts in the affected areas and a timely callback of Department personnel.

Department specialized units such as Air Support, Horse Mounted Unit and the Motor Squad were highly effective.

What did we do wrong?

Dust masks were needed because of the smoky conditions. They were not readily available, but were obtained quickly. The Police Department now has a cache for future incidents.

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Civilian support units were not immediately notified during the initial phase of the incident and called back. In the future, initial notification would reduce delay in their support.

Police paging was delayed because Fire-Rescue Department pages are routed through the system first, followed by PD pages. Fire-Rescue pages inundated the system, thus causing delays to the paging of police personnel. A solution would be for the Police Department to have its own paging system.

Communications between agencies and disciplines needs to improve. For example, the Horse Mounted Unit was working in Ramona and could not communicate with either the SDPD or the SDSO. Santee Command had no communications with the SDSO even though they were working in their jurisdiction. The Department needs a radio system that can communicate with all county agencies and disciplines. All patrol radios should be upgraded to the XTS 5000 to serve that purpose.

What changes do we need to make in the City's fire codes?

Not applicable

Do we need any changes in our force composition?

A personnel management software program, such as Telestaff (currently used by Fire and being evaluated by our Department), would have more effectively staffed the incident. During the fire, all Department personnel were called back at once, thus creating our own personnel void with no relief pool from which to draw.

Do we need any additional equipment?

The Department Operations Center had to function with outdated/antiquated equipment due to budget constraints. The Department needs a state of the art DOC with computer, display, and communications equipment, along with personnel (Telestaff) and incident management software.

The Department needs two Command Post vehicles capable of commanding an incident from the field for a sustained period of time. Current vehicles are old, ill equipped and incapable of sustained operations.

Air Support Helicopters need upgraded onboard communications equipment to enable them to communicate between different agencies and disciplines.

Do we need to make any changes in our mutual aid system?

No changes are recommended. The Law Enforcement mutual aid system is in place by Government Code throughout the state via established protocols. The only issue that should be

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considered when requesting or providing mutual aid is whether the impending disaster could impact our own jurisdiction as it expands. In the Cedar Fire, the SDPD deployed officers in a mutual aid capacity, however at the same time the fire was moving in the direction of the city limits. It could have significantly impacted our abilities if our officers could not have redeployed into San Diego.

Council Directed Follow-Up – Wildfire Issues

The only item that comes under the auspices of the Police Department is Item #8, which requested a review of the San Diego Municipal Code to identify changes to allow the “Law of the Moment.”

During the Cedar Fire, officers conducted mandatory evacuations in numerous neighborhoods. The authority to do so comes from California Penal Code Section 409.5, Authority of Peace Officers...to close disaster areas. This section states, in part:

“Whenever a menace to the public health or safety is created by a calamity including...fire...officers...may close the area where the menace exists...by means of ropes, markers or guards to any and all persons not authorized...to enter or remain within the enclosed area....”

While the statute gives law enforcement officers authority to close areas menaced by calamity, the Council might wish to refer review of emergency response laws to the City Attorney, to answer any questions about a law enforcement officer’s authority to conduct mandatory evacuations during emergencies. Also, the Council might wish to consider public education on the roles and responsibilities of emergency personnel to prepare residents for any future calamities.

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Chief of Police

cc: Libby Coalson, via email